

BEFORE THE
POSTAL RATE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, DC 20268

In the Matter of:

:

East Vassalboro, Maine 04935

: Docket No: A2012-34

Save Our Post Office Committee, Jan Murton, Helen LaFleur, Vivian Flamm, Dianne Hogendorn,
Charles Ferguson :

PARTICIPANT STATEMENT

The Save the Post Office Committee Petitioners are appealing the Postal Service's Final Determination concerning the East Vassalboro post office. The Final Determination was posted October 5, 2011.

In accordance with applicable law, 39 U.S.C. & 404 (d) (5), the Petitioner(s) request the Postal Regulatory Commission to review the Postal Service's determination on the basis of the record before the Postal Service in the making of the determination.

We believe the Postal Service's Final Determination should be reversed and returned to the Postal Service for further consideration for the following reasons:

We believe the Postal Service's procedure is flawed and should be questioned. Notice of the community meeting was not well publicized and should have been scheduled at a time and place that encouraged customer participation. Instead it was scheduled on May 26th at 5:00 at the Vassalboro town office. The 26th was the Thursday before Memorial Day while many residents were either still at work or away for the Holiday. Only nine people attended. The response to the community concerns about the social gathering importance of the post office was, "residents could meet at other businesses, churches or private residence." There are no churches on Main St and the only other business is a small store. These issues were addressed at the sparsely attended meeting on the 26th but were answered with remedies that residents find were inappropriate or not feasible. A resident at the meeting asked whether the meeting was to be recorded and the answer was "No, notes will be taken". Very few notes were taken even though the meeting lasted over an hour. Many in attendance felt as if no one was listening or paying attention to their needs and that the decision had already been made.

The location where the community meeting was scheduled is also an issue as the town office is 2.4 miles away while the Vassalboro Grange is next door to the post office. On July 28th the community gathered at the Vassalboro Grange to discuss the possible loss of our post office and over 30 people were in attendance. Representatives from Senators Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins and

Congresswoman Chellie Pingree were at the meeting, as well as State Senator Roger Katz and State Representative Karen Foster. Further evidence of community support is shown by the petitions (with 224 signatures) opposing the closing of our post office that were sent in July to the U.S. Postal Service.

The Postal Reorganization Act calls for the Postal Service to provide a maximum degree of effective and regular postal service to rural areas and small towns. The closing of the East Vassalboro post office certainly does not meet this standard as rural delivery is not an option. Many in the community are elderly, retired, widowed or disabled and don't drive; walking to the post office is their only daily exercise. The closest post office is 2.5 miles away. There is no reasonable alternative access available to the community; window services cannot be provided by rural carriers such as package weighing, mailing and the purchasing of stamps or money orders.

Over and above its impact specifically on postal service, closing the post office in town would be a dagger to the heart of community life in East Vassalboro. A blossoming pedestrian culture exists in town, and it revolves around the post office. To nurture it, the citizens of the town have spent several years honing a Strategic Plan, and recently received a grant for sidewalks connecting the post office with the other parts of the village. News that the town's hub might disappear has been devastating. On any given day the town can bustle with pedestrian activity that converges on the post office. And the daily trip to the post office is used as an occasion for further stops at the Country Store, the library, the tiny summer Farmers' Market, and so on. Several are marginal enterprises, newly hopeful, and without the post office, all will suffer.

We understand that the decision to close a post office cannot be made solely on whether a post office is self-sustaining; surely economics plays a factor in this decision and we believe the Postal Service's calculation of the economic benefits of closing our post office is inaccurate:

1. The Postal Service assumes that every penny of income that the East Vassalboro branch currently receives would be received by the North Vassalboro branch if the post office is closed. Everyone who has learned of this assumption finds it odd.
 - a. Almost none of the folks who now rent boxes in the post office (to which they can walk) would rent boxes in the next town over. This skews the Postal Service's calculation by thousands of dollars. If many box holders did transfer to the next town the increase in volume would most likely mean additional staff would need to be hired.
 - b. Much of the over-the-counter package-delivery business that now comes the post office's way would revert to Fed Ex and UPS. It's hard to assign a dollar figure to this loss of Postal Service revenues, but it would not be insignificant.
 - c. Closing the post office would accelerate the shift to electronic communication, against which our town had provided a small bulwark. It would not relieve but accelerate a transition away from purchasing post office services.

For reasons that remain mysterious to most people in town, the business generated by North Country Rivers is not being credited to the East Vassalboro post office. They have used this post office as their

business and corporate office for over 20 years. They use a postal meter and estimate using \$50,000 per year of postage. The U.S.P.S. has reported profits at this post office from 2008-2010 in excess of \$20,000 while a loss is being reported for 2011. Before postage was downloaded to North Country River's meter, the meter had to physically be brought to the office for postage to be loaded manually. One must question why these funds are not now being credited to the East Vassalboro post office, which is now reporting a loss.

We believe our community post office is being sacrificed to meet the Postal Service's financial troubles, even though closing small rural post offices would not significantly be a cost saver, as they account for less than eight-tenths of one percent of the Postal Service's total operating budget. We think the decision to close our post office is not being made based on our local situation. Small rural post offices serve a crucial role across our nation and in many areas of Maine; the tradition of the post office serving as the spirit and heart of the community continues. The closing of the post office in East Vassalboro would be a terrible loss to the community, and for the reasons cited above, we find the decision unjustified.